



Innovation in Agriculture

The farm has always functioned as a center for innovation within the agricultural industry. In order to be successful, farmers take on a multitude of roles and tasks. One of the most important roles could be described as that of “Innovator.” Whether it is solving a small problem, or tackling a large-scale project, the combination of farmers’ experience, knowledge and creativity is showcased in the positive impact of their innovation on the farm.

Two major projects, currently underway on a Western New York dairy farm, clearly demonstrate the importance of innovation in agriculture. Noblehurst Farms, located in Livingston County, is taking on the tasks of building a new digester and establishing a cold milk separation plant.

Noblehurst Farms was formally incorporated in 1960. It is owned by members of the Noble and the Klapper families, along with many of their employees. Their family heritage of farming extends back seven generations to the early 1800s. The farm is larger than the average New York dairy farm. With approximately 40 employees, the farm milks 1,700 cows and grows corn, alfalfa and wheat on 2,400 acres of land.

Digester Project

An anaerobic digester system can be a useful addition to a dairy farm. Such a system uses bacteria to break down manure and other substrates in an oxygen-free environment. The process creates biogas, largely methane, which can be used to power a generator to produce electricity. The remaining byproducts are separated into solids that can be used as animal bedding and liquids that can be spread as fertilizer for crops.

There is another important benefit to such a system. Not only does the system serve as a method for generating renewable energy, it also reduces unpleasant odors, literally cooking them out of the material as it is processed.

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NEWS OF INTEREST ABOUT RURAL NEW YORK STATE

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In 2003, the farm installed one of the first digesters in New York State. It generated about 130 kilowatts. Unfortunately, in 2011 a fire destroyed the generator. While the digester could continue to be used to separate manure, it could no longer generate electricity.

Rather than rebuild the existing system after the fire, the farm owners decided it was an opportunity to enlarge the system and take advantage of improved technology developed overseas.

The new digester will be a complete-mix circular system, which is common in Europe and can also be found in Canada. It is quite different from the more typical plug-flow design often found in the United States. It will be 100 feet in diameter and 30 feet tall. Though more expensive to install, it will have the capability to produce significantly more electricity. Mr. Chris Noble, Vice President of Noblehurst Farms, estimates the new system will have the capacity to generate enough electricity to power the equivalent of 300 homes. The system will be connected to the local power grid and is expected to meet the power needs of the farm.

The project has seen support from both the New York State Energy Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture.

"It's a technology we feel really good about," said Mr. Noble. "We're reducing our carbon footprint. We're pushing forward on environmental sustainability."



*Digester panels being installed at Noblehurst Farms.
(Photo courtesy of Noblehurst Farms)*

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Milk Separation Project



*Cold milk separation facility construction underway at Noblehurst Farms.
(Photo courtesy of Noblehurst Farms)*

The second project, a milk separation facility, is an even larger investment than the digester. While it is also being built at Noblehurst Farms, the scope of the \$12 million project extends beyond a single farm. Noblehurst Farms and seven other dairy farms in Livingston and Wyoming Counties have partnered to form Craigs Station Ventures. The eight farms, in turn, have partnered with Dairy Farmers of America, a national dairy cooperative, to create Western New York Enterprises to build and operate the new facility. It is the first time that the dairy cooperative has invested directly with dairy farms to build this type of a plant on a farm. Additionally, Empire State Development has supported the project with tax credits through the Excelsior Jobs Program.

The facility will use a cold separation technique to create skim milk and cream that are highly marketable as value-added products. By using a cold process, rather than a process that heats the milk, the resulting products are improved. The skim milk created in the process has a better protein yield. That makes it more desirable to cheese makers and yogurt producers, especially for those companies making Greek yogurt. Additionally, the Northeast is one of the best markets for cream, given the number of producers who need it to manufacture ice cream, cream cheese or similar products.

The processing facility will provide significant cost reduction for the eight local farms investing in the project. They will no longer need to transport their milk long distances for processing. Instead, the locally-produced milk will be processed close to home.

Project Benefits

Each project by itself is innovative and exciting. When viewed together, it is important to note the synergy of the two projects. The milk separation facility will be powered by the digester. This further reduces the costs of operating the facility. The effluent from the plant can also be processed through the digester.

The economic development advantages cannot be overlooked either. Economic development agencies play an important role in helping businesses turn their innovative ideas into economic growth and business expansion. In this case, Livingston County Development Group helped coordinate the expansion plans with a variety of groups including NYSERDA, the region's electric utility company and local municipalities. With agriculture as the top industry in Livingston County, projects like these provide jobs and further economic benefit to an area that is becoming an important center of food production.

"We're happy to be working with an agribusiness as they grow and diversify," said Ms. Julie Marshall, director of Livingston County Development Group. "It's a pleasure to work with them and see their innovation."

Construction is underway for both projects. According to Mr. Noble, they plan to have the digester operational by June and the milk separation plant running in September.



Both projects are important steps being taken to diversify and grow the business. At the same time, the farm recognizes that it is important to do so in a manner that benefits the community, protects the environment and supports local agriculture. "People want to know their farmer and want to know their products are being produced in a sustainable manner," said Mr. Noble.

It is an innovative approach to those goals.

Empire Evergreens

It can take nearly a decade of hard work and careful attention to transform seedlings into well-shaped Christmas trees that decorate homes during the early winter. Mr. David Weil, owner of Empire Evergreens, takes on that task by growing and caring for 200,000 trees on 160 acres in Painted Post, New York.

His farm has been in the family for generations. It originally started as a tobacco farm and then shifted to a dairy farm in the 1900s. About 30 years ago, milk prices and property taxes made it increasingly difficult to operate the farm. With a strong sense of family heritage and tradition, Mr. Weil created a plan to preserve the farm. In 2003, he embarked on a new path by establishing Empire Evergreens. It is now one of the largest tree farms in New York State.

The farm grows a wide range of Christmas trees including Douglas Fir, Balsam Fir, Canaan Fir, White Pine, Scotch Pine, Colorado Blue Spruce, Norway Spruce and White Spruce trees. Mr. Weil is working to expand these offerings in the future.

They also grow trees to sell as balled-and-burlap nursery stock. However, that portion of the business was hit hard during the recession of recent years and the associated housing market collapse. There has been some uptick in this business, but it has not returned to pre-recession levels.

About a quarter of their business is retail. With the farm open to the public from the day after Thanksgiving until December 24th, many visitors opt to browse among the rows of trees to find their ideal tree. Other guests choose from among a selection of freshly cut trees.

There are many challenges in the business. While raising Christmas trees can be profitable, the costs – including land costs, property taxes and capital expenses – can be quite high. There are significant price pressures within the business as well as competition from out-of-state farms. Simply planning for the future is a challenge. Due to a lengthy growing period for the trees, Mr. Weil is planning for 2020 and beyond. He



Tending to future Christmas trees.
(Photo courtesy of Empire Evergreens)

expects to plant around 25,000 trees each year.

The process of raising trees is also quite labor intensive. Each tree is visited three or four times throughout the year for shearing, mulching and other attention. Much of that work is done by hand. Like many farms, weather conditions are a huge factor, and the trees can be quite sensitive to fluctuations of those conditions. In particular, dry conditions may require farm employees to focus their efforts on irrigation for the trees.

Mr. Weil sees a bright future for the farm, despite competition from artificial trees. He continues to see a strong demand for real Christmas trees. “You’re really selling the experience of families coming to the farm,” said Mr. Weil, describing his role as both a farmer and a salesperson.

“You get out what you put into it,” he said.

Rural Libraries – Essential for Rural Communities



The Almond Library provides vital services to the local community. (Photo courtesy of the Almond Library)

For more than 100 years, the Almond 20th Century Club Library has been an integral part of the Village of Almond and the surrounding community. Each month the library circulates over 1,000 items, provides patrons with access to computers and online resources, and hosts a wide range of community programs and activities.

This public library in Almond is a member of the Southern Tier Library System. There are 48 libraries in the system, most of them rural. “Libraries provide a great service with a huge impact on communities in rural areas. They play a real pivotal role,” said Mr. Brian Hildreth, Executive Director of the Southern Tier Library System.

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Rural libraries fill an important niche within their communities. Despite a move toward more electronic materials like e-books, rural libraries across the country have seen increased usage in recent years.

His statement is backed up by a recent study released by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency whose mission is to support the nation's libraries and museums. The study provides details about the usage, funding, electronic resources and staffing of rural and small public libraries in the United States. It is titled "The State of Small and Rural Libraries" and is authored by Deanne W. Swan, Justin Grimes and Timothy Owens.

There are over 750 public libraries in New York State, of which nearly 44 percent are considered rural libraries. According to the report, rural libraries face significant challenges, especially in terms of funding and staffing. Since the economic recession, revenue for public libraries across the country has dropped. Additionally, rural libraries have much lower staffing levels than their urban counterparts, often having only one or two employees. They also tend to be open for fewer hours on average than urban libraries.

Even with these challenges, rural libraries are adapting to new technology and serving increasing numbers of visitors. According to the study, visits to rural libraries have increased by four percent over the past three years to an average of 6.7 visits per person annually. In comparison, visits to urban libraries have declined by nearly two percent. Interestingly, visitation for remote rural libraries, those libraries farthest from urban centers, has even higher average per capita visits at 7.6 visits per year.

These trends hold true in the Southern Tier Library System where patron visits have increased five percent or more since 2008.



An excited patron during a visit to the Almond Library.
(Photo courtesy of the Almond Library)

Circulation of print materials continues to increase. There has been a dramatic increase in the use of digital materials like eBooks and downloadable audio books as they have been introduced in recent years.

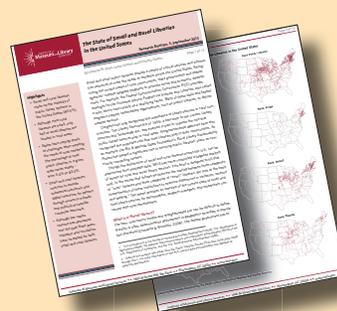
While some forecasts have warned of the downfall of libraries due to increased usage of electronic resources, Mr. Hildreth disagrees. He believes that libraries are embracing the digital revolution and that it has enhanced libraries' abilities to provide services to their communities.

Furthermore, with limited broadband access in many rural areas, libraries often serve as a portal for patrons to get online. The report describes how rural libraries often outpace urban libraries in technology and infrastructure improvements, resulting in higher computer usage by patrons.

It is yet another reason that the library in Almond is important to the community. "Computer use has really risen. Many people don't have internet access at home," said Ms. Jean Pilgrim, President of the Almond 20th Century Library Club.

The report concluded that rural libraries have continued to adapt to the changes they face and have done so in a way to meet the needs of their communities. Mr. Hildreth agreed with many of the findings and described that investment in rural libraries provides one of the greatest returns for communities. Rural communities value their local libraries. Many government, community and social services are often located in other towns or cities at significant distance from rural communities. Rural libraries often step in to fill the gap by offering their meeting spaces to non-profit, government and social groups to meet the needs of the local community.

That sense of community is echoed by Ms. Sandra Robinson, the library director at Almond 20th Century Club Library. "We want to be a community center, as well as a library," she emphasized. "We have the space for it and feel an obligation to the community."



THE FULL REPORT ON SMALL AND RURAL LIBRARIES CAN BE FOUND AT

www.ims.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/Brief2013_05.pdf

An Apple a Day... at School

Every day, as students in the Broadalbin-Perth Central School District fill their meal trays, many select a bright red apple. They are easy to grab, easy to eat, and they are provided by a local orchard.

For more than two decades, Rogers Family Orchard, located in Fulton County, has been providing apples throughout the school year to the Broadalbin-Perth district. They also supply apples to schools in Johnstown and Gloversville.

Every Monday, Mr. Todd Rogers, owner of the family-run orchard, steps into his truck to deliver apples. Usually he selects McIntosh apples for the schools, but he also provides Macoun, Red Delicious and Empire varieties. Between the three school districts, the orchard supplies 40 to 50 bushels of apples every week.

The orchard has been operated by the Rogers family since 1970, when Mr. Rogers' father, then a professor at Fulton-Montgomery Community College, purchased the orchard. Mr. Rogers bought the orchard from his father in 1990. It has always been a family business. Mr. Rogers grew up working on the orchard. His son Mitchell, currently attending SUNY Cobleskill, is working with his father to establish a cidery at the orchard. They are also building a bakery on site.

The orchard grows 15 or 16 different varieties of apples. Many of the apple trees were planted decades ago, and the Rogers family has continually expanded the orchard. They expect to plant another 500 to 600 trees for next year, and they hope to add the newest varieties of apple trees to the orchard.

In a good year, like this year, the orchard produces 4,000 to 5,000 bushels of apples. On the other hand, the previous two years were very difficult for the orchard. Unfavorable weather conditions in those years resulted in crop losses of 70 percent or more. Still, whether or not the weather cooperates, Mr. Rogers strives to provide the local school districts with the best fruit possible.



Apples ready to be picked at Rogers Family Orchard

With new regulations requiring students to take servings of fruits or vegetables with their school meals, apples have proven to be a popular choice. Before the apples are placed on the serving line at Broadalbin-Perth for breakfast and lunch, they are washed and individually bagged. Doing so makes it easy for students to select an apple to accompany their meal, or to stow it away for a healthy mid-morning or afternoon snack.

Mr. George Hanstein, Food Service Director for the Broadalbin-Perth Central School District knows the value of buying local produce. The apples provided by Rogers Family Orchard are of the highest quality. That is very important to Mr. Hanstein because colorful, unblemished apples are more likely to attract the attention of students.

A local supplier also means speedy service. When the school district finds itself running low on the fruit, they simply place a quick call to the orchard. Mere minutes later, Mr. Rogers personally delivers a fresh supply.

It is yet one more reason that the school district buys them locally.

Profile of a Rural Police Officer:

Jennie Alessi

School Resource Officer, Gowanda Central School District

School Resource Officer Jennie Alessi is passionate about teaching, training and her role as a rural police officer serving in the Gowanda Central School District.

She did not begin her career in law enforcement. Previously, she worked as a consultant in the dental profession. It was after a discussion with the Gowanda Chief of Police that she considered a career in law enforcement. Not long thereafter, she found herself attending the Police Academy, an entirely new environment for her. She graduated at the top of her class. Currently she holds the rank of Detective.

Detective Alessi is well-attuned to the difficulties faced by rural police officers, and she teaches other rural police officers about them at the Rural Police Training Academy at Genesee Community College. Her specialties include juvenile law and domestic violence training. She has also taught about community policing, media relations, homicide investigation and more.

She is quick to point out many of the factors unique to rural police officers and departments. Greater geographic distances and logistical hurdles must be overcome. For example, hospitals and mental health facilities may not be readily available nearby. Arrival of a fellow police officer as backup may take half an hour, rather than just a few minutes as it might in an urban environment. As a result, rural police officers must be ready to verbally de-escalate a situation until additional help can arrive.

That is why intervention and de-escalation skills are a focal point for her. She spends much of her time training other law enforcement personnel to hone these important skills. She also puts them into practice within the school district by making it a priority to connect with students. She takes a proactive



Photo courtesy of School Resource Officer Jennie Alessi

approach to help ensure the safety of students and encourage them to follow a path toward success. She does so because she views the school community as a microcosm of the community as a whole.

In the same way, she points out that rural police officers must understand the importance of knowing and being known within their community. "Smaller communities want to know their police officers – and they should," said Detective Alessi. Whether that community is a school environment or a rural town, she believes it is vital that rural police officers remain connected to the people they serve.

In addition to her current duties, Detective Alessi is taking on a new challenge. She will complete an undergraduate degree in Conflict Resolution and Dispute Studies at Hilbert College in April. She will continue her education by pursuing a master's degree in Criminal Justice Administration. She plans to put her education and experience to use as a professor where she can educate and train the next generation of law enforcement professionals.

Fighting Phytophthora Blight

In recent years, New York State's vegetable farmers have set production records for their crops, making the state fifth in the nation for the value of its fresh market vegetable industry. It is a direct reflection of their tireless efforts in growing crops that include cabbage, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet corn, peas, snap beans and much more. Each farmer carefully works to ensure they can harvest fields of high-quality vegetables. Yet, many factors such as weather, pests and disease can make their job more difficult.

One such problem, Phytophthora blight, a disease caused by a water mold – an invasive species of sorts – can be devastating. This tiny spore can spread to a field and ruin portions or entire crops, leaving vegetables moldy and useless. It was first reported in Long Island in the 1950s and has been battled in the state for decades.

That is why researchers from Cornell University are working hard to fight its spread and improve farm management practices to combat this pathogen. Cornell faculty member Dr. Christine Smart is tackling this issue at a blight farm at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, New York. The farm was established with the help of funding from New York State.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Christine Smart and the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station

Once the spores have found their way to a field, it is virtually impossible to get rid of them. Worse yet, they can be easily spread, especially because they are capable of moving in water. The spores have been located in fields throughout the state, most recently spreading into Schoharie County, likely a result of flooding that has occurred in that region in recent years. Over the last decade, the state has seen more storms producing greater than an inch of rain, resulting in more standing water that allows for the spread of the disease.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Christine Smart and the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station

According to Dr. Smart, preventing the spread of the pathogen is key to vegetable production in the state. In addition to flood waters, Phytophthora can be spread by irrigation water, culled fruits and vegetables, farm equipment, and to a lesser extent, animal and human traffic through fields. Dr. Smart is reaching out to farmers across the state to recommend practices to avoid spreading the disease. Methods include improving field drainage, protecting irrigation water, and ensuring that tractors and people do not spread the spores by transporting contaminated soil to a field that does not have them. It is also important to take care with culled vegetables. If they contain the spores, they can contaminate the field where they are placed.

With mold spores surviving in the soil even through cold winters, once a field has been contaminated the challenges increase dramatically. Much of Dr. Smart's research is focused on developing an integrated management strategy and working with breeders to develop resistant varieties of vegetables. Recommendations can include rotating out a host crop for three years to reduce the number of spores in the soil, or to incorporate architectures that keep vegetables above the ground and out of contact with the spores.

Dr. Smart and her team are not alone in this effort. They work closely with growers, breeders and other colleagues across the country to better understand Phytophthora. Given the increasing value of New York State's produce crops, researching Phytophthora blight and preventing its spread become ever more important.

For more information about Phytophthora blight, contact Dr. Christine Smart at cds14@cornell.edu.

Heating with Wood Chips

This will be the third winter that bioenergy, rather than fuel oil, serves as a primary source of heat for the South Lewis Central School District. In this rural community where logging is an essential part of the economy, wood chips are used to heat many of the buildings in the school district.

Located in Lewis County, the school district consists of two elementary schools, a middle school and a high school. It serves more than 1,000 students who reside in a geographic area spanning 350 square miles, one of the largest in the state.

The middle school, high school and bus garage are located on a single campus that is heated by a wood chip boiler system. Doing so has produced dramatic cost savings, conservatively saving the district \$100,000 or more annually.

A local supplier regularly delivers truckloads of wood chips to the facility. The wood chips must meet a specific set of criteria, including moisture content. During the coldest portion of the winter the school district might use 80 or 90 tons of wood chips per week, requiring four deliveries in that time frame.

The system is largely automated. Wood chips are stored in a large bunker, and they are transported via conveyor belts to the boiler where they are efficiently burned. The thermal energy that is generated is transferred to liquid glycol, which is used to heat the school.

Part of the appeal of the system is its ease of operation. "The biggest eye opener was how clean and efficient the system is," said Mr. Douglas Premo, Superintendent of the South Lewis Central School District. The system requires just a few hours

of monitoring, cleaning and maintenance each week. It can be remotely monitored and automatically reports problems to the manufacturer, maintenance staff and school administrators. The manufacturer, located in Michigan, has the capability to diagnose problems and fine-tune the system remotely.

Bringing this alternative energy to the school district was the result of a careful process of research and community involvement. With the cost of fuel oil increasing and becoming more difficult to predict, the school district embarked on an effort to look for a new energy source. They explored options such as natural gas and other alternative energies, including geothermal energy. Most options were not cost effective, unavailable locally or did not suit the school district's geographic location.

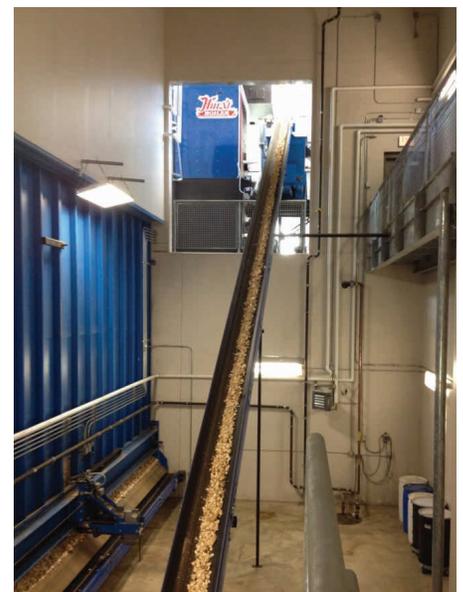
The school district opted for a logical choice – wood chips. The price stability of wood chips and their local availability helped with the decision. Visits to a school in Vermont and a hospital in Elmira provided the opportunity to see the technology in action.

The project was overwhelmingly supported by the community. With the support of State Senator Joseph Griffo, the school district was able to fund the project through a combination of state school building aid and an "Expanding our Children's Education and Learning" (EXCEL) grant.

Since installing the system, the school district has seen interest in the technology from other organizations. They have hosted a number of open houses, including a tour on this year's National Bioenergy Day.



LEFT: South Lewis Central School District's wood chip boiler. (Photo courtesy of South Lewis Central School District)



RIGHT: Conveyors transport wood chips to the boiler. (Photo courtesy of South Lewis Central School District)

Walking with a Purpose

For Mr. Chris Allinger, a recent walk through the countryside was no ordinary stroll. Instead, it was a hundred-mile hike along the roads and through the towns of Tompkins County, undertaken to fight child hunger in the county. The event, called "Walkin' the Country II," was the second time in two years that Mr. Allinger laced up his sneakers in a campaign against hunger.

Mr. Allinger is a morning radio show host in Ithaca. He and his radio station are no strangers to taking on the hunger issue, often conducting food drives or raising awareness with a unique twist.

The idea for the walk began with his physician's recommendation to get more exercise. When he discovered the Food Bank of the Southern Tier's Backpack Program, Mr. Allinger heeded his physician's call and decided to turn his quest for exercise into a lengthy hike to raise funds for the program.

The Backpack Program began in 2005 as a direct outreach to meet an important need in the Southern Tier. It initially started as a pilot program in three school districts. Around 35,000 children in the Food Bank's six-county service area receive free or reduced cost lunches within their schools. Yet, there is still an important need to provide healthy meals for many of these children over the weekends and holidays.

By working with school districts, and with the permission of parents, packs of easy to prepare, nutritious food are discreetly placed in students' backpacks on Fridays, or before holidays.



A donation for the Food Bank of the Southern Tier's Backpack program is added to Mr. Chris Allinger's backpack during his fundraiser. (Photo courtesy of Mr. Chris Allinger and 103.7 Q Country, WQNY FM)



Mr. Chris Allinger during his 100-mile journey through Tompkins County. (Photo courtesy of Mr. Chris Allinger and 103.7 Q Country, WQNY FM)

According to Ms. Natasha Thompson, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, Mr. Allinger's fundraiser has been an important part of growing the program. "The event allowed us to dedicate resources throughout the county, not just in one place," she said.

The Food Bank has taken a careful and deliberative approach to growing the program to ensure that they are able to sustain it over the long-term. Even so, they expect to meet their goal of serving all 41 school districts within their service area by January 2014, a full year ahead of schedule.

Mr. Allinger strapped on a backpack and set a goal to collect three dollars from each person that he met during his five-day journey through towns and the countryside of Tompkins County. At each stop along the way people took the time to add money to the backpack he carried on his back.

Each donation of three dollars covered the cost of filling a single backpack for the program.

The response far exceeded his expectations. He was grateful and excited for the support, openness and generosity of the people he met on his journey. Mr. Allinger summed it up simply. "It was remarkable. The people I met almost couldn't do enough," he said.

Mr. Allinger recalled one of those remarkable moments. In the middle of a rainstorm, along a busy two-lane highway, a woman pulled over to ask if he was "that guy" out walking. She did not want to miss the opportunity to donate money to the cause.

While he lost 20 or so pounds on his journey, making his physician quite happy, he also collected \$28,000 in donations for the Backpack program. In 2012, he collected around \$20,000 for the program. Perhaps most importantly, he raised awareness of child hunger and encouraged the support of an important solution in the Southern Tier.

For more information on the Backpack Program visit the Food Bank of the Southern Tier's website at www.foodbankst.org. Details about Mr. Allinger's event can be found at www.1037qcountry.com.

USDA Rural Development: Working to Expand Broadband Access

On Thursday, October 24, 2013 representatives from the United States Department of Agriculture / Rural Development teamed up with colleagues from the New York State Broadband Program Office at The Wild Center in Tupper Lake to discuss available programs, funding opportunities and benefits of bringing and building a robust broadband network in the North Country. This is one of many ongoing outreach opportunities throughout the state.

More than 60 members of the community attended and participated in the seminar including community leaders and representatives, telecom providers, both state and federal program recipients, business owners and interested residents.

Christopher Stewart, Special Projects Coordinator / Broadband Coordinator for USDA Rural Development in New York answered some questions about broadband access in rural areas and the programs offered by the USDA:



Photo courtesy of USDA Rural Development

Question: How can broadband benefit my community?

Answer: The public safety, economic development, healthcare and educational opportunities for New York's rural communities, linked to broadband access, are immeasurable. For example, community safety improvements through building out and expanding communication networks, bolster signal strength and range in areas that previously may not have been as robust.

Q: Are there opportunities for small business?

A: Yes. We see entrepreneurs emerge in areas where broadband is readily available. Small businesses increase their market competitiveness as they expand the reach and availability of their products and services – thereby creating jobs and opportunities that were once nonexistent.

Q: How does broadband availability translate to healthcare?

A: We see advances in the adoption of Health Information Technology services, such as electronic health records and telemedicine, where rural patients who may have had to previously travel a great distance can now visit a local clinic and speak with medical specialists that are towns, counties or even states away.

Q: How can our schools benefit?

A: Education is another sector that sees tremendous growth as well. Both USDA programs through the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) and New York State Broadband Program have assistance for educational institutions, libraries and Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) – thereby connecting students via virtual classrooms to new and exciting classes, topics and applied coursework otherwise not previously available to them.



To learn more about this and other programs offered by USDA Rural Development call their State Office in Syracuse, NY at (315) 477-6400 or visit their website: www.rurdev.usda.gov/NYHome.html.

More information about New York State's Broadband Program is available via phone at (866) 322-5787 or on their website: www.nysbroadband.ny.gov.

Broadband Expansion in the North Country

In 2010, Slic Network Solutions, a communications company in Nicholville, New York, applied for a federal grant to construct 139 miles of fiber to reach 750 households in unserved areas of Franklin County in upstate New York. Slic was awarded \$5.3 million from the USDA's Rural Utility Service (RUS) via the Broadband Initiative Program (BIP). Based on that success, Slic applied for another \$27 million to construct 660 miles of fiber passing over 5,400 households. Slic was awarded that grant as well. Today they have completed all of the fiber construction and are connecting 50 customers per week. They will have provided first-time access to broadband service to more than 3,000 households by year's end, and customer response has been extremely positive.

Planning for Floods

The annual hurricane season that produces heavy tropical rainstorms has wrapped up for the year. Spring rains are still a few months away. Within recent years, New York State has been visited by quite a few of these storms that have resulted in waterways overflowing their banks.

With many rural communities located along creeks and rivers, flooding is a huge concern. Homes and businesses have been inundated or even carried away by rushing waters. Farmers have seen their newly-planted crops or pending harvests washed away by floodwaters. These natural disasters are devastating and costly to the affected communities, and recent floods underscore the need to analyze and mitigate flooding risks.

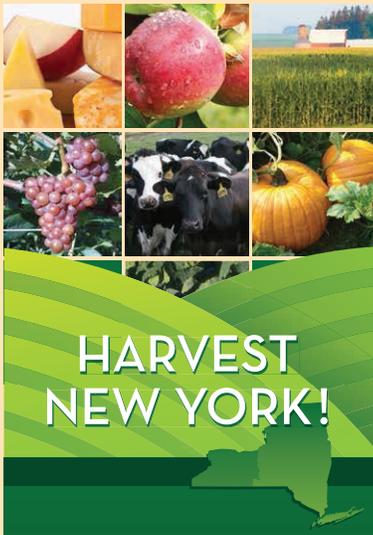
Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts can be important resources in addressing these issues. The Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District, in particular, has developed a number of resources and training materials designed to help communities update their approach to flooding.

One of these tools is called a Local Flood Hazard Mitigation Analysis. It is a two-phase process implemented by communities on a voluntary basis. The first phase consists of a detailed scientific analysis of an area using flood maps, topography data and hydraulic modeling software to determine the likelihood of flooding. The second phase analyzes the feasibility of specific flood mitigation projects and prioritizes them.

Use of this tool can improve public safety and reduce future water quality issues. It can also ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent effectively in flood mitigation efforts, and it could potentially reduce flood insurance premiums. It might be an invaluable resource for communities facing flooding risks.

For more information about the Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District, visit their website at www.dcswcd.org.





Bridging the GAP

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) are standards that have been established to ensure that fruits and vegetables are grown, handled and stored in a safe manner to maximize the safety of food for consumers. Farms are certified through audits conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other organizations. GAP certification is increasingly being required by wholesale buyers of fresh produce.

Presently there are only 15 USDA GAP certified farms, as well as an unknown number of farms that are privately certified, in the five-county area of Western New York consisting of Erie, Niagara, Chautauqua, Cattaraugus and Allegany Counties.

In an effort to increase the capacity for locally sourced produce to meet wholesale demand, the Harvest NY team, in partnership with local Cornell Cooperative Extension offices, submitted grant proposals to expand upon Cornell University's current GAP program. This program will offer intensive one-on-one technical assistance to farmers interested in undertaking the certification process within the five-county region.

Through interviews with the region's farmers, both GAP certified and non-GAP certified, the project team learned this would be an invaluable service to aid in a greater number of farms obtaining this important safety certification. Ultimately, it will enable them to maintain current markets and/or extend their reach into a broader range of wholesale markets.

For more information about Harvest New York, visit their website: www.harvestny.cce.cornell.edu.

Tackling Tick-borne Illness

The bite of a tick carrying the bacterium that causes Lyme disease can result in different outcomes for different people. Many individuals may develop the signature bull's-eye rash and respond well to treatment. Others may go on to develop serious and debilitating long-term symptoms. Still others may not develop any significant clinical symptoms.

Unlocking the genetic reasons for the different reactions is important to Dr. Timothy Sellati, a researcher at the Trudeau Institute in Saranac Lake. He stresses the importance of understanding the big picture, as well as the minute details. He is eager to share his knowledge about Lyme disease. He carefully describes the process where the bacterium is transmitted from a small mammal, such as a white-footed mouse, to a larval tick. Later, bacteria can be transmitted from a nymphal or adult tick to a human. He is working to understand how that bacterium affects the individual who is infected, in particular how it affects the balance between pro-inflammatory and anti-inflammatory molecules that are produced as a reaction to the infection.

Dr. Sellati wants to establish a research center to develop what he describes as "the infectious disease equivalent of the Manhattan Project." He wants to bring together the best researchers, clinicians, government representatives and others to coordinate efforts to understand, treat and prevent tick-



Dr. Timothy Sellati. (Photo courtesy of the Trudeau Institute)

borne illnesses. He is optimistic that pooling technical, intellectual and administrative resources – coupled with some out-of-the box thinking – will yield promising results in the battle against tick-borne illness.

For more information, contact the Trudeau Institute at (518) 891-3080 or visit their website: www.trudeauinstitute.org.



Photo courtesy of Julia Lilkendey

Farm Aid Concert

More than 25,000 people gathered at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center on September 21, 2013 to enjoy Farm Aid's first trip to upstate New York. Certainly, performances by Willie Nelson, John Mellencamp, Neil Young, Dave Matthews and others drew many of the attendees to the sold-out event. But so did the focus on family farms and locally grown food. The annual concert is the centerpiece of an effort to support family farmers. It is the longest running benefit concert series in the United States.

In addition to the music, the event provided concert-goers with opportunities to learn more about farming, participate in interactive exhibits, and taste products from family farms in New York State.

Of particular note were the food donations that were collected at the event. Farm Aid partnered with the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York and encouraged concert-goers to bring donations of non-perishable goods to the event. According to Mark Quandt, Executive Director of the Food Bank, 4,500 pounds of food – more than two tons – were donated. The Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York collects food donations and distributes them to charitable organizations in a 23-county area that encompasses eastern New York State.



Julie Larsen Maher © Wildlife Conservation Society.
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Reintroducing Hellbenders

As the third largest known species of salamanders in the world, Eastern hellbenders have a singular, almost strange appearance. With their wrinkled brown or reddish-brown slimy skin, flattened heads, dorsal fin along their tail, and their large size – reaching lengths of nearly two feet long as adults – hellbenders are a far cry from the small, colorful salamanders that many people picture. This species of salamander is known by names as remarkable as its appearance, including: Allegheny alligator, devil dog and snot otter.

While a keen observer on a hike might notice small salamanders scurrying to hide underneath leaves on a damp forest floor, finding a hellbender is a more difficult task. They are a fully aquatic species of salamander, preferring to live in the quickly-flowing water of rocky streams where they can hide under large rocks and hunt crayfish, frogs and fish. The salamander is listed as a species of special concern in New York State.

As part of a collaborative conservation effort, hellbender eggs were collected by the Department of Environmental Conservation from the Allegheny River drainage. The eggs were hatched at the Buffalo Zoo in 2009, and the young salamanders were raised at the Bronx Zoo's Amphibian Propagation Center.

In August, 38 young hellbenders were reintroduced to streams in western New York and carefully placed under submerged rocks. Each salamander was tagged with small chip that can be used to identify them in the future. It is an important step in reversing the population decline of this unique species.



Photo courtesy of the Grape Discovery Center

Grape Discovery Center

Vineyards are an important part of the landscape along the narrow stretch of land near Lake Erie between Harbor Creek, Pennsylvania and Silver Creek, New York. It is called the Concord Grape Belt, and a brand new visitor's center in Westfield, New York shares the long history and heritage of this area.

Located on Route 20, the center welcomes visitors to stop by for a tour of exhibits about the grape industry. The combination of the area's geography, soil conditions and favorable climate has resulted in the establishment of 30,000 acres of vineyards and 24 wineries that produce juices, jams, jellies and wines – all celebrated by the Grape Discovery Center.

The center was envisioned by the Concord Grape Belt Heritage Association, whose mission is to support

and promote the grape and wine industries within the region. The center was established through the generosity of private donors and through a state grant secured by Senator Catharine Young. In 2008, the association purchased and renovated a building that had previously served as a car dealership, and in September, the Grape Discovery Center celebrated its grand opening.

Not only can visitors learn about the grape industry, but they can also taste local wines at the center. Younger visitors have the opportunity to try grape juice, often leaving with great excitement over discovering a love for grape juice – and the purple color it leaves on their tongues.

The Grape Discovery Center looks forward to sharing that same enthusiasm with many more groups and individuals in the years to come.



Photo courtesy of the Grape Discovery Center

More information about the Grape Discovery Center can be found on their website: www.grapediscoverycenter.com.

SAVE THE DATES



-  **New York State Agricultural Society - Annual Forum**
“The Next Generation of Agriculturists: Millennials’ Perspectives on Their Future in Agriculture”
January 9, 2014
Holiday Inn Liverpool/Syracuse, NY
www.nysagsociety.org
-  **Christmas Tree Farmers Association of New York, Inc.**
2014 Winter Convention
January 23-25, 2014
Holiday Inn Liverpool/Syracuse, NY
www.christmastreesny.org

-  **New York Forest Owners Association**
“Learn More, Earn More” Free Forestry Program Presentations
New York Farm Show
February 20-22, 2014
New York State Fairgrounds
Syracuse, NY
www.nyfoa.org

-  **New York Rural Water Association**
35th Annual Technical Conference & Exhibition
April 14-17, 2014
Turning Stone Resort, Verona, NY
www.nyruralwater.org/conference/main-index.cfm

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